

Fort Corpse

Grant Landry's first kiss was not what he had expected. He had learned the hard way that his girlfriend, Viola Mendez, was Patient Zero. She still looked mostly human and mostly alive at the time. Grant's hormones banished all caution from his mind. Viola turned her head sideways, opened her mouth to an unnatural width, and clamped her jaws onto the corners of his mouth. Grant now has no skin between his nose and his lower lip, but he doesn't seem to mind. He and his lady are now royalty among the living dead.

Upon receiving news of the virus, Votsboro law enforcement officials had barricaded Viola and Grant's neighborhood from the rest of the city. They felt confident in their ability to contain the lethargic cadavers—unlike a lycanthropy outbreak, which would have warranted a mass evacuation. The barricade grew more elaborate over the following months until an entire suburb was surrounded by a prison wall. Locals dubbed the enclosure *Fort Corpse*.

Viola and Grant enjoy special privileges among the zombie population. As Patient Zero and Patient One, respectively, they wield a kind of inborn authority over others of their kind. Grant now bears his skinless grin as a mark of nobility, and Viola has finally found a man who will not leave her.

Zombies mate for life, after all. In the absence of living humans, they have been forced to procreate. The process is similar to that of regular humans, but the birthing process more closely resembles that of an aphid. The young—usually multiples—eat their way out of the womb. Those young corpses will be cannibals until they reach sexual maturity. Animated corpses who have their heads crushed in brawls or freak accidents become carrion for infants. A biweekly delivery of Votsboro's roadkill feeds the adults.

Votsboro's department of tourism recently set up a firm scaffolding with a guard rail around the perimeter of Fort Corpse's walls. The truly-living can gaze with horror and awe at the exotic creatures within. Tourists can order drone photographs and *I ♥ FC* t-shirts (with bite marks in the heart).

Visitors and residents of nearby neighborhoods are completely safe from the corpses. Local pathologists have concluded that the zombie virus can only be transmitted through physical contact with the blood of a living person. A cure may be possible, they say, but the idea has failed to generate interest.

"I wouldn't hold my breath about that issue" said Mayor Petrey. "I mean, why sink hundreds of thousands of dollars of research into a medicine that will only cripple our tourism industry? I mean, they're not even human anymore! Look at 'em!"

Viola, Grant, and their kingdom of the undead are not and never will be *our* problem . . . right?